

Archived Information

JULY 11, 1997

Dear State Directors:

The Office of Special Education Programs is eager to work in partnership with you as a state director in ensuring smooth implementation of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997, (IDEA '97). Having seen the excellent results of collaboration and communication during the reauthorization process, we are determined, with your help, to continue that spirit of unity and openness throughout the implementation of IDEA '97. This letter briefly outlines some of the structures and processes we have put in place to implement IDEA '97 and to reach out in an interactive exchange with our customers and partners. I know we all share the same vision of providing the very best services possible for infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities and their families. To do this the federal government, state and local administrators, teachers and parents must all work in concert using the same interpretations and providing teachers the tools and skills they need to implement IDEA '97. Below is a brief overview of what we are doing in a number of important areas: Regulations/Policy.

We are reviewing the new and old statute, regulations and policy letters as well as listening to all interested parties so we can quickly make recommendations regarding regulations for IDEA '97. We will provide you with numerous formal and informal opportunities for input into the development of regulations. An initial Notice of Request for Advice and Recommendations on Regulatory Issues under the IDEA Amendments of 1997 appeared in the Federal Register on June 27, 1997 inviting interested parties to provide input on areas in which regulations are needed to clarify the statute. Please send your thoughts about areas where the law may be unclear. In addition, we are holding four outreach meetings with various interest and constituency groups to get input regarding regulations and other aspects of the implementation; and by August OSEP staff will have met with representatives from almost every state in meetings arranged by the Regional Resource Centers. Your input and ideas in these meetings so far have been invaluable. In the fall the Department will publish proposed regulations for IDEA '97. Subsequently we are planning a series of regional meetings around the country and hope you will provide us with your feedback on the proposed regulations at that time. Monitoring/ State Applications/State Improvement Plans.

In an effort to ensure that all fifty-six States and entities implement the new requirements of IDEA 97 in an expeditious and systematic fashion, OSEP is studying possible changes to its 1997-1998 monitoring effort. You will receive more information on this as plans develop. Public Awareness, Outreach, and Training. We are reaching out to all interested groups that need to learn about IDEA '97. We are asking how we can provide them with information and skills, and how we can ensure that all materials are technically correct. We are working toward conveying consistent and accurate information. In order to ensure quality and accuracy of information, we have asked that all materials about IDEA '97 developed with federal funds be approved by the Department of Education. OSEP is working with our technical assistance providers to create quality materials that can be used for training and technical assistance activities on implementation of IDEA '97. The materials will provide people in your state with documents that will help explain all parts of the law. Knowing the importance of parents, teachers and administrators all having the same information, we are scheduling training sessions at many related conferences, and where possible and necessary, sponsoring independent training. Our web site (www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP) will be updated regularly, so check it frequently for new materials and progress reports. In addition, we plan to send out monthly updates to keep you and other groups apprized of our progress. Discretionary Programs.

We are presently reviewing the varied activities necessary to implement the changes to the discretionary programs. First IDEA '97 now combines the previous 14 authorities into 7 authorities under Part D, National

Activities to Improve Education of Children with Disabilities. Other changes in IDEA '97 include creating standing panels to evaluate discretionary applications by January 1, 1998; developing a process for your and other stakeholders' input in the proposed priorities for fiscal year 1998; and establishing a comprehensive planning process for the discretionary activities beyond 1998. Your work is critically important in expanding educational opportunities for students with disabilities. We will keep you informed of our progress and send you further clarification about our plans for monitoring and other aspects of IDEA '97 implementation. And as always we welcome your comments, input, and ideas.

Sincerely,

Tom Hehir, Ed.D.
Director
Office of Special Education Programs